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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0611  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1937  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8973  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7211  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5154  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3352  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5110  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1387  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0645  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4220  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9534  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6834  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1316  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3766  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000942

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY AIMING FOR DECISIVE VICTORY IN  
SOUTHERN PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION VALERIE C. FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4  
(B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The government is aiming for a strong showing in this Saturday's final provincial election in the heart of the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) Sinhala Buddhist constituency to set the stage for victories in the upcoming Presidential (January) and parliamentary (April) elections. PolOff and PolAssistant traveled to several towns in southern province, including Tangalle and the president's hometown of Hambantota, meeting with candidates, election monitors, and representatives from the various contesting parties. Overall, the campaign was characterized by intimidation and dirty tricks by both sides, though the ruling party -- with its access to state resources -- made much wider use of such tactics. Post predicts a decisive victory for the UPFA coalition, but it is unclear whether they will achieve their much-touted goal of 80 percent. END SUMMARY.

Southern Election: Bellwether for National Elections

12. (C) President Mahinda Rajapaksa is hoping for a decisive victory in his home province to set the stage for his reelection in the January national elections. The UPFA -- which includes the president's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) -- has won each of the previous seven provincial council elections and is counting on the electorate's continued appreciation for the defeat of the LTTE for its victory. Rajapaksa's home province is 90 to 95 percent Sinhala Buddhist, but the UPFA is concerned with potential spoilers such as the yet-to-be announced United National Alliance, an alliance between the United National Party (UNP) and a breakaway of the SLFP's senior members, which could split the Sinhala Buddhist vote in the upcoming national elections. The UPFA has set its bar for victory high, predicting an 80 percent margin of victory.

13. (C) The UPFA's main opposition, the UNP, conducted a low-key campaign, claiming that confronting the UPFA's corrupt campaigning was a waste of their energy. Instead, the UNP appears intent on conserving its political capital for

the national elections. UNP officials vaguely referred to the UNA announcement and said that the party had held off making an announcement due to fear of the government's reaction. Despite its frustrations with the UPFA's campaign, the UNP projected its confidence in its party leadership and in Sanjith Premadasa, the former president's son, whose public works have made him a popular candidate in the southern province.

14. (C) The JVP conducted a high-profile campaign, and the party's red flags were visible all over the southern province. JVP offices were attacked with little police response, especially in Galle and Matara, JVP officials presented Poloff with a detailing of each incident.

#### Harassment, Election Violence

15. (C) The ruling party's blatant use of state machinery, police inaction, and police and military harassment of the opposition continues as in all past seven provincial elections. It is organized and systematic. Much of the election violence is internal to the UPFA and over preference votes between Rajapaksa loyalists and stalwart SLFP members. The government's intimidation of the UNP increased closer to Hambantota, while it appeared to be more focused on the JVP in Galle and Matara, probably in response to each party's relative strength in the respective locales. (NOTE: The UNP won four seats in the previous southern provincial election, as did the JVP as part of its electoral alliance. END NOTE.)

COLOMBO 00000942 002 OF 002

PolOff observed police cut down legal UNP campaign flags while interviewing a UNP candidate, and observed numerous illegal UPFA flags and posters. Opposition campaigners reported that economically vulnerable voters were intimidated by threats from the government to withdraw their food stamps if the UPFA discovered they voted against the ruling coalition.

#### Comment

16. (C) Most observers are confident that the ruling SLFP will win a comfortable majority in this weekend's election. But it may be difficult for the UPFA to get the 80 percent it has been promising, even with its strong-arm tactics. Anything less than a two-thirds majority in the president's Sinhalese-Buddhist home constituency will be a matter of concern for the ruling party going into presidential elections in January.

17. (C) The violence and intimidation observed by PolOff and PolAssistant was directed primarily at party buildings, billboards, etc., and less physically at individuals, though PolOff and PolAssistant did hear several reports of violence against the opposition. The latter have not been passive, but rather have fought back, giving the southern election campaign a wild-West atmosphere. The ruling party clearly saw these elections as an opportunity to get warmed up for the presidential and parliamentary elections in January and April, respectively. It is unclear, however, whether they will be able to use the same strong-arm tactics they employed on their home turf to such advantage elsewhere.  
BUTENIS